

The Common Goal of Universal Peace in Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith

A paper delivered to the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace

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Honorable delegates and all our Buddhist brothers and sisters, we are indeed honored to be present at this historic occasion, the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace. Baha'is around the world send their warmest greetings to you all.

The Baha'i International Community, which consists of Baha'i communities in virtually every country and represents a cross-section of humanity consisting of more than 2,000 ethnic backgrounds in over 108,000 localities, with 152 elected national councils and membership of more than five million believers, lives by the principles and teachings of Baha'u'llah, the Founder of the Baha'i Faith. The aim of the Baha'i Faith is to achieve the unity of mankind and Universal Peace.

Our bond of friendship and understanding is not limited to just the subject of peace; it includes the spirit of utmost reverence for the Lord Buddha. Both His Holiness Baha'u'llah, whom we believe is the Manifestation of God for this age, and Lord Buddha were descendants of ancient kings and taught the path to the emancipation and the end of suffering for all mankind. To Baha'is, the Lord Buddha is not only a Divine Teacher, He was a Manifestation of Holiness, a Day-Spring of the Ancient Glory and a Manifestation of the Sun of Truth.

We join hands with you in raising the world-embracing vision of a Buddha land where all nations, races and creeds will come to love one another, and injustices, wars and discrimination will vanish. Instead, the peoples of the world with their varied cultures will cooperate together to improve their lives not only spiritually and intellectually, but also socially, economically and in the realms of science and arts.

It was in pursuit of this noble objective that the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Baha'i Faith, launched a new initiative for peace to which Baha'i communities throughout the world responded with vigor and enthusiasm. "The Promise of World Peace," a statement issued by this august body, has been presented to many world leaders and numerous peace related activities have been organized around it. The hope is that through this process, the ideas, concepts and approaches contained in the statement will become part of our consciousness and that all our efforts for peace will take place with the confidence that world peace is not only possible, but inevitable.

However, we have a choice. Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behavior, or is to be embraced now by an act of

consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth.

To the Baha'is, Spiritual Luminaries like the Lord Buddha and Baha'u'llah have always been the basic link between humanity and that Ultimate Reality Who has been the Source of achieving spiritual success, social order and progress. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, militant religious fanaticism and corruption have sadly undermined the spiritual values which are conducive to the unity of mankind. This tragedy is worsened by the already growing cynicism of increasing numbers of people about religion and the unrestrained glorification of material pursuits and man-made ideologies. Our greatest challenge, therefore, is to view in all humility and the utmost compassion this basic issue, that theological differences can be submerged for the nobler path of advancing the cause of world unity and world peace. Lord Buddha told us to transcend sectarian dogmatism (Sutta-Nipata) and He discouraged metaphysical questions (Majjhima-Nikaya).

The universal love and goodwill which the Lord Buddha and His Holiness Baha'u'llah have taught us must necessarily be evinced through greater efforts towards the cause of universal peace and the brotherhood of man.

The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched patterns of conflict, can change to world in which harmony and cooperation will prevail. World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind. Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for the organization and administration of the world as one country, the home of mankind. In the Baha'i view, recognition of the oneness of mankind "calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world - a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units." (Baha'i Writings)

This principle "does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of languages and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity." (Baha'i Writings)

Banning nuclear weapons, prohibiting the use of poison gases, or outlawing germ warfare will not remove the root causes of war. However important such practical measures obviously are as elements of peace, they are in themselves too superficial to exert enduring influence. People are ingenious enough to invent yet other forms of warfare, and to use food, raw materials, finance, industrial power, ideology, and terrorism to subvert one another in an endless quest for supremacy and dominion. Therefore, a genuine universal framework must be adopted. We believe that some of the barriers to world peace and the role that religions must play to develop this universal framework are as follows:

1. The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge. When women play a greater role in achievement of world peace, communities will give a higher priority to peace.
2. The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. The solution calls for the combined application of

spiritual, moral and practical approaches.

3. Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. The promotion of racial equality based on the recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.
4. Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Love of all the world's people does not exclude love of one's own country. His Holiness Baha'u'llah has said that "*the earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.*"
5. Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.
6. The cause of universal education deserves the utmost support. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded to all its citizens. Consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.
7. A fundamental lack of communication between peoples seriously undermines efforts towards world peace. Adopting an international auxiliary language would go far to resolving this problem and necessitates the most urgent attention.

We hope you can join us in promoting these practical steps to achieve the common goal of universal peace in Buddhism and the Baha'i Faith.

I would like to close this presentation with a hymn from the Sutta-Nipata and verses from the Baha'i writings.

May creatures all abound in weal and peace; may all be blessed with peace always; all creatures weak or strong, all creatures great and small, creatures unseen or seen, dwelling afar or near, born or awaiting birth, may all be blessed with peace! - Sutta-Nipata -
O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony. O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind. O God! Establish the Most Great Peace. - Baha'i Writings -

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